

WHEN DOES TRAINING HAVE A MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION? ANALYSIS OF INNOVATIVE TRAINING METHODS

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Purpose: The primary objective of this paper is to characterize key innovative training methodologies that exert the greatest influence on employee motivation for continuous development of both soft and hard competencies.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis is further supported by qualitative data obtained through interviews with professionally active full-time and part-time students.

Findings: Based on the responses collected, a ranking of innovative training methods with motivational potential was established, accompanied by a detailed characterization of each method. Among the most highly valued methods identified by respondents were coaching, case study analysis, and hybrid training models. Additional methods recognized for their effectiveness included the use of virtual reality (VR)-based training, gamification techniques, and role-playing scenarios.

Research limitations/implications: It should be noted, however, that the study presents certain limitations. First, the research is exploratory in nature, constituting a pilot study; second, it was conducted among participants with relatively limited professional experience who may, as a result, display a somewhat subjective approach to the matter of training. Future research is intended to expand the scope through large-scale quantitative studies involving employees with greater job tenure, with a focus on exploring the multifaceted dimensions of training and development practices.

Practical implications: The training techniques identified in this study may serve as practical guidance for managerial staff in determining which learning interventions to implement when designing an organizational training strategy.

Originality/value: Identification of training methods that play the most significant motivational role in employee development.

Keywords: Training programs, training strategy, coaching, case study method, hybrid training.

Category of the paper: Literature review/ Research paper.

1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations build their strategies upon the knowledge, experience, and engagement of their workforce. So-called knowledge workers are increasingly recognized as the most valuable asset and a critical factor in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Consequently, in order to continuously enhance their competencies, organizations implement a variety of innovative courses and workshops tailored to individual developmental needs. These initiatives reflect the organization's learning philosophy- that is, the importance it places on employee training and development (Armstrong, 2003). It is worth noting that „to successfully navigate the complexities of innovation, companies are increasingly adopting novel technologies that facilitate the optimization of processes, stimulation of creativity, and facilitation of growth” (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 280).

From the perspective of a learning organization, „training and employee development are understood as the creation of conditions and the initiation of a learning process through which individuals acquire new knowledge and enhance the skills and competencies necessary to perform effectively in their current and future roles. Simultaneously, this process contributes to the continuous improvement of the organization itself” (Woźniak, Kozioł, 2012, p. 182). „Training refers to bridging the gap between the current performance and the standard desired performance” (Elnaga, Imran, 2013, p. 139). As emphasized by J. Marciniak, effective innovation in training requires adherence to the following core assumptions (Marciniak, 1999):

- Comprehensiveness, understood here as ensuring training accessibility for all employee groups.
- Systemic approach, based on active collaboration between company representatives and employees in the design and implementation of training programs that crucially align with both organizational needs and employee expectations.
- Goal alignment, which involves incorporating the company's mission, organizational culture, and long-term development plans into the training strategy.
- Flexibility, which assumes that training planning and implementation should remain responsive to ongoing changes and emerging trends in methods and techniques aimed at enhancing employee skills and qualifications.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to identify and characterize key innovative training methods that have the greatest impact on employee motivation for continuous professional development. Given the wide spectrum of such methods, the selection was based on interviews conducted with both full-time and part-time students who possess professional experience. These respondents identified the training approaches they consider most significant in terms of motivating them to pursue career growth accompanied by a rationale for their choice. The research sample consisted of 60 individuals. Based on the responses given by the

participants during the group interviews, (which have been categorized), a ranking of innovative and simultaneously motivational training methods was developed.

The following section presents an overview of the most frequently mentioned methods.

2. Coaching

One of the most innovative and, at the same time, widely adopted training methods is coaching. It was the most frequently mentioned approach among respondents. Participants emphasized that, when facilitated effectively, coaching has the capacity to unlock individual potential and serves as a long-term source of inspiration for pursuing ambitious organizational goals.

Such opinions are fully justified, as coaching is widely recognized by experts as one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving tools for personal and professional development (Świątek, 2017).

Polish organizations are increasingly recognizing the value of coaching as a strategic tool for developing their key employees. However, the effective implementation of coaching practices requires the establishment of an appropriate organizational culture- one in which employees are open, collaborative, and willing to share knowledge (Tokar, 2015). According to J. Ober, „one may attempt to formulate a universal framework of organizational culture that would serve as the foundation for a more universalistic model of management” (Ober, 2022, p. 94).

The subject literature offers numerous attempts to define and conceptualize the notion of coaching. As noted by E. Parsloe i M. Wray „it is a process through which knowledge acquisition and personal growth become possible, ultimately leading to the enhancement of skills” (Parsloe, Wray, 2008, p. 49). Coaching is also „an educational philosophy dedicated to supporting learners’ personal and professional development and growth and supporting them to reach their potential” (Atkinson et al., 2022, p. 441). It should raise participants’ awareness of their own expectations and learning needs (Parkes, p. 114).

Both individual and group coaching utilize specific techniques that enable the implementation of the outlined priorities. In summary, it is worth emphasizing that coaching offers a wide range of benefits. Among the most notable are (Dźwigoł- Barosz, 2017):

- Targeted on-the-job training, allowing employees to acquire specific competencies while performing their professional duties.
- Learning through practice, as coaching is embedded in the workplace environment.
- Recognition as one of the most effective methods of employee development.
- Relatively low implementation costs compared to other training methods.
- Improved employee productivity.

- Increased promotion opportunities for employees following coaching sessions.
- Reduced risk of losing top talent.
- Support in achieving both organizational and individual career goals.
- High effectiveness in addressing challenges arising from macroeconomic changes.

It is important to emphasize that the success of the entire training process largely depends on the coach, or facilitator. Although the coach is typically an experienced practitioner in a given field, they are not intended to serve as a role model, nor should they exercise formal authority. The coach's primary role is to draw on their professional experience to support the employee in diagnosing performance-related challenges and conducting an analysis aimed at resolving the identified problems. The effectiveness of this developmental approach depends not so much on the coach's technical expertise, but rather on their interpersonal competencies—particularly communication skills and the ability to build trust (Woźniak, 2012).

Therefore, in order to implement coaching effectively within an organization, it is necessary to employ highly qualified specialists with extensive experience and an appropriate approach toward the training participants.

3. Case study method

Another training method indicated by the respondents— one that motivates them not only to acquire new knowledge but, more importantly, to engage in creative action for the benefit of the organization is the case study method. Their view is consistent with the opinions of experts in this area, who also emphasize its positive impact on motivation.

In such analysis, "various difficulties and challenges are identified, along with their causes and sources, as well as potential corrective actions. Moreover, the process involves actively seeking effective solutions" (Lis, 2015, p. 57). In other words, this method involves a group of participants analyzing a case that presents a specific organizational problem. Its foundation is a concise account of an event, typically presented in written form (not exceeding one typewritten page), as an audio recording, or in the form of a video clip (Pacana, 2017). It is important to emphasize that the case description should not include all relevant information upfront. Following the introduction, presentation of the topic, clarification of the session's objectives, and familiarization with the case narrative, participants enter the information-gathering phase. A key principle of this method is withholding complete data initially, while responding precisely and selectively to the questions posed by participants (Pacana, 2017). After the problem scenario has been presented, participants engage in analysis and discussion to determine: alternative and potentially optimal solutions, preventive measures that should be implemented to avoid recurrence of the issue, and appropriate courses of action in the event of encountering a similar situation in the future (Pacana, 2017).

For the method to serve as an effective training tool, it must be emphasized that “the preparatory activities leading to the development of finalized educational products (business case studies) involve a series of procedural tasks related to data collection and information processing. The construction of such case studies requires not only alignment with instructional objectives (tailoring the content to the learners' needs), but also the implementation of appropriate information management systems throughout the preparation phase” (Zięba, Ziółkowski, 2015, p. 56). Moreover, “the activities aimed at developing a formalized method (procedure) for acquiring information for business case studies involve several steps that appear to be typical across all types of such studies. This implies the necessity of designing general (generic) frameworks that facilitate the construction and delivery of case studies within educational environments, addressing the training needs of various learner groups (including, among others, students and business professionals)” (Zięba, Ziółkowski, 2015, p. 56).

4. Hybrid training

Hybrid training programs were recognized by the students as a significant group of innovative learning methods. According to P. Głowicki i G. Łasiński „there is no single ideal method of instruction- the response to contemporary demands in knowledge acquisition lies in the attempt to combine traditional training programs with e-learning formats. Blended learning can thus be considered a new category of education, rather than merely a new mode of delivery” (Głowicki, Łasiński, 2009, p. 264). In the view of M. Gęborska, while the incorporation of emerging technologies into educational practice is unavoidable, the complete elimination of traditional instructional methods in favor of exclusively technology-based learning remains highly unlikely (Gęborska, 2012). „In common usage, the term e-learning refers either to remote education delivered via the Internet, or more broadly, to any form of instruction supported by information and communication technologies, not necessarily requiring an Internet connection (through the use of open educational resources” (Gęborska, 2012, p. 10). The vast majority of e-learning platform users still perceive distance education as a supplement to traditional forms of instruction- typically aimed at enhancing and reinforcing the content delivered during face-to-face sessions (Gęborska, 2012).

An essential aspect is the organizational readiness for the implementation of hybrid learning. The implementation framework of this system was compellingly addressed by P. Głowicki. He divided the entire implementation process into four main stages. The first stage is based on a comprehensive analysis of educational needs, technological capabilities, infrastructure development potential, and potential risks associated with the implementation (Głowicki, 2009). The second stage involves the design of the system. This is considered the most complex phase, as it requires careful planning and technical expertise. The development

of e-learning courses at this stage may involve the use of advanced authoring tools and digital learning platforms (Głowicki, 2009). The third stage involves the implementation of the system, which includes a pilot course, a pilot project, and the deployment of the hybrid learning system. The fourth and final stage is the evaluation and adjustment of the system. This process should be conducted on a quarterly basis or following the completion of individual training projects (Głowicki, 2009). Although this form of development can prove highly effective, it is nonetheless associated with several risks, such as employee resistance to training due to limited technological proficiency, as well as cognitive overload resulting from excessive information exposure.

Consequently, as noted by N. Rupic, “it is therefore a great challenge to create a digital learning experience that uses multimedia in a balanced way so that it is stimulating but not overwhelming, engaging but not frustrating and challenging but not overly complex. The right choice of multimedia has a positive effect on learners’ attitudes toward learning and the material presented, but it can also stimulate their reasoning, critical thinking and memory. It is important to arouse learners’ curiosity for new content but also to emphasize the most important learning points” (Rupic, 2024, p. 282).

5. Training programs incorporating Virtual Reality (VR)

When analyzing the statements of the surveyed students, particular attention should be paid to training programs that utilize virtual reality (VR). This form of training was highlighted for its significant educational and motivational value, primarily due to its ability to simulate real working conditions for a specific job role. Virtual Reality „is a technology that enables users to immerse themselves in a simulated, interactive environment. Using dedicated VR headsets, learners can see, hear, and experience a digitally created world as though they were physically present within it. This immersive quality makes VR a powerful tool for experiential learning, allowing organizations to utilize it for a variety of educational and developmental purposes” (Nagrabski, 2023, pp. 463-464). It is worth emphasizing that „an immersive environment allows learners to be totally immersed in a self-contained artificial or simulated environment while experiencing it as real. Immersive environments can offer learners rich and complex content-based learning while also helping learners hone their technical, creative, and problem-solving skills. Because immersive environments are so rich and visual, users tend to be highly engaged. There are several types of immersive environments: virtual worlds, web-based video games, massively multiplayer online games, multiuser virtual environments, simulations, augmented reality” (Velev, Zlateva, 2017, p. 35).

The application of virtual reality (VR) technologies appears to be particularly advantageous in training scenarios where real-life implementation involves a significant risk to human health or safety. Consequently, VR-based training programs are most commonly utilized in high-risk sectors such as medicine (virtual surgeries), nuclear energy (reducing workers' exposure to ionizing radiation), and mining (Grabowski, 2012).

An innovative application of the discussed training methods is their implementation in the field of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). The use of Virtual Reality (VR) technology for training employees in safety and hygiene protocols has a demonstrably positive impact on workplace safety. This technology enables the creation of immersive virtual environments in which employees can be trained safely and effectively in response procedures to potential hazards specific to their occupational setting (Szóstak, Napiórkowski, 2023).

6. Gamification

Another technique highlighted by the respondents, valued not only for its educational benefit but also for its motivational impact, was gamification. It is regarded as “a modern tool that employs game mechanics to engage users in the completion of specific tasks. The foundation of gamification lies in the use of positive reinforcement-such as points and rewards- that encourages individuals to undertake and complete challenging activities” (Misztal, 2015, p. 102). An illustrative example of this approach may be the incorporation of a board game-style quiz into a training session. Participants, divided into small groups, engage in the game by advancing through spaces on the board. At each step, they are required to complete tasks associated with a specific field- primarily answering questions related to the knowledge conveyed during the training session (Woźniak, 2015).

It is worth emphasizing that „from the perspective of mechanisms activated by gamification, the benefits derived from engagement in gameplay outweigh the potential drawbacks of reduced opportunities to repeatedly review content with each move made by the participant” (Woźniak, 2015, p. 20). Moreover, through the application of game-based mechanisms, the employer is able to identify the employee's strengths demonstrated during gameplay and strategically align them with the individual's professional development within the organization (Czerska, 2017). Moreover, gamification can serve as an effective method of professional development by fostering experiential learning, self-improvement, and growth through interpersonal collaboration and cooperation. It also presents a valuable solution for learning organizations, where employees' tacit knowledge is codified and effectively leveraged in the implementation of innovative social projects (Winnicka-Wejs, 2015).

K. Filarski and A. Włodarczyk highlight additional benefits derived from the application of this method, such as (Filarski, Włodarczyk, 2014):

- Transferring development from the training room to the workplace- gamification integrates training activities into a cohesive framework, enabling learning to occur in real work contexts rather than isolated classroom settings.
- Introducing elements of fun and excitement into the training process- this increases the likelihood that the tools and techniques acquired during training will be applied in everyday work scenarios and internalized as habitual behaviors.
- Providing continuous feedback- training participants receive ongoing information about changes in their behavior and have the opportunity to compare their own actions with those of other participants, fostering self-awareness and encouraging improvement.

Considering the above aspects, it can be unequivocally stated that gamification constitutes a highly attractive form of training effectively motivating employees to engage in the comprehensive development of both hard competencies (including domain-specific knowledge) and soft skills (such as communication and broadly understood teamwork within employee groups). An essential condition for the effective implementation of this method within an organization is the selection of a game that reflects organizational realities.

7. Role-playing

The final technique highlighted by the respondents was role-playing. This method is primarily associated with the development of soft skills, such as interpersonal communication, empathy and teamwork. Given that the possession of such competencies is increasingly valued by modern employers, employees are demonstrating a growing willingness to engage in these types of training programs.

Role-playing involves both the training participant and the facilitator assuming specific roles (employer and employee) to simulate real-life workplace interactions. The primary objective of this method is to demonstrate appropriate behavioral responses to situational challenges. Errors made during these simulations are reframed as valuable experiential learning opportunities, contributing to the participant's professional growth. This instructional approach familiarizes employees with difficult or high-pressure scenarios and provides a safe environment for exploring alternative courses of action (Pawlak, 2003). Moreover, this technique focuses on enhancing cognitive empathy, understood as the ability to recognize, comprehend, and take into account another person's perspective (Bandach, 2013) or it also facilitates knowledge transfer and renewal (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2015).

Conclusions

„Many researchers agree that education and skills will be a key factor in increasing competitiveness, and one of the most important preconditions for achieving this goal is quality lifelong education” (Kuzior et al., 2023, p. 2).

Contemporary managers are increasingly seeking answers to the question of which training methods to select in order to meet employee expectations and foster continuous development of their competencies. In order to develop an effective training strategy, the first essential step is to identify the specific training needs of the workforce (Belina, 2017) (using structured questionnaires). Subsequently, it is essential to select training programs that align with the expectations and professional profiles of the workforce. As demonstrated by the aforementioned analysis, a wide range of diverse instructional methods is available, each offering comprehensive opportunities for high-level skill development. The respondents expressed the highest appreciation for coaching, case study analysis, as well as hybrid training. Training formats incorporating virtual reality, gamification, and role-playing were also highly valued. These methods ensure a high level of interaction among participants, thereby facilitating effective knowledge acquisition. Naturally, the success of the entire training process hinges on the trainer, who must be capable of inspiring participants to engage actively in the course while emphasizing the practical application of acquired knowledge in the workplace.

Given that the subject addressed in this study is highly relevant, it is planned to conduct future research (this time quantitative) on a much broader scale, among employees with longer work experience, with particular attention devoted to the diverse aspects of training.

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